



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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**State Health Department Cautions Parents About the Dangers
of Lead Poisoning**
Public Health Week in North Dakota Focuses on Healthy Communities and Healthy Children

BISMARCK, N.D. – In conjunction with *Public Health Week*, the North Dakota Department of Health is reminding parents of the dangers of lead poisoning in small children.

Gov. John Hoeven recently signed a proclamation declaring April 3 through 9, 2006, as *Public Health Week* in North Dakota. The focus of this year's campaign is the impact of healthy communities on the health of children.

"Lead poisoning is a serious issue for children," said State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D. "Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, seizures, coma and even death. It's important that we make our communities, day cares and homes safe for our children, including checking for the presence of lead in the environment."

About 310,000 children younger than 6 in the United States have blood lead levels high enough to cause harm. In North Dakota in 2003 and 2004, 22 children age 6 and younger tested positive for high levels of lead in their blood.

The major sources of lead poisoning among children are lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust. Lead-based paints were banned for use in housing in 1978. However, about 24 million homes in the United States contain surfaces painted with lead paint, as well as high levels of lead-contaminated house dust. Other sources of lead poisoning include imported toy jewelry, drinking water (lead pipes, solder, brass fixtures and valves can all leach lead), and some imported candy (specifically candy from Mexico).

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“Lead poisoning is entirely preventable,” Dwelle said. “The key is stopping children from coming into contact with lead and testing children who may have been exposed to lead. In addition, lead hazards in a child’s environment must be identified and removed safely.”

To reduce blood lead levels in children, the Department of Health offers the following recommendations:

- Ask a doctor to test your child if you are concerned about exposure to lead. Treatment is available for children whose blood levels are unsafe.
- Contact the state health department about testing paint and dust from your home if you live in a house or apartment built before 1978, especially if young children live with you or visit you.
- If you live in a home built before 1978, damp-mop floors; damp-wipe surfaces; and frequently wash a child’s hands, pacifiers and toys to reduce exposure to lead.
- Use only cold water from the tap for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Hot water is more likely to contain higher levels of lead, and most of the lead in household water usually comes from the plumbing in the home, not from the local water supply.

Governor Hoeven’s *Healthy North Dakota* initiative focuses on wellness and prevention anywhere people live, learn, work and play.

“As parents, we try to provide the safest environment possible for our children,” said First Lady Mikey Hoeven, spokesperson for *Healthy North Dakota*. “Checking for the presence of lead in our homes is an important way we can ensure that our children grow up healthy.”

For more information about the dangers of lead poisoning, contact Dawn Mayer, Division of Injury Prevention, at 701.328.4536. For information about testing your home for the presence of lead, contact Sandi Washek, Division of Air Quality, at 701.328.5188. For information about *Healthy North Dakota*, contact Melissa Olson, director, at 701.328.2372.

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